

VANCE'S LETTER BOOK.

Interesting Extracts From the Correspondence of North Carolina's Famous War Governor--Showing How Nobly the Man Battled for the Rights of His State and the Comfort of His Troops in the Field and in Prison.

Messenger Bureau, Park Hotel,
Raleigh, N. C., June 12.
(Special Correspondence.)

What a mine of information is to be found in Governor Vance's letter books. His sturdiness, his love for his "North Carolinians" are visible as one looks over the pages.

Here is a typical letter. It is dated July 5, 1864:

"General Whiting: Some six weeks ago I addressed a letter to the secretary of war in regard to the exemption of D. L. Russell, Jr., county commissioner for Brunswick. No answer has yet been received and I learn that young Russell has been ordered by you into camp. Mr. Russell was 'dismissed the service,' was not a conscript until he was enrolled. Previous to his enrollment he received this appointment, which made him a state officer, 'necessary to the due administration of the laws.' In accordance with the act of congress and the resolutions of the legislature of this state, I have given him a certificate of exemption. This I cannot recede from, and especially in favor of a government which will not answer a respectful letter on the subject. I therefore notify you that your order to arrest Mr. Russell or to disturb him in the discharge of his official duties will be taken as a deliberate and unwarranted usurpation of authority and will be resisted accordingly."

Governor Vance wrote Secretary of War Seddon the same day: "I have waited anxiously for a reply to my letter in regard to the exemption of Daniel L. Russell, Jr., as an officer of this state. None has been received, but I am told General Whiting has orders to conscribe him immediately. I simply wish to inform you that I cannot and will not submit to this being done without resisting it by every means at my command."

General Whiting replied on the 8th, saying: "Your letter of the 5th has been forwarded to the war department and in regard to it, considering the manner in which you have addressed me, you will permit me to inform you that I do not admit the propriety of your animadverting upon the action of the government of the confederate states or its conduct of its correspondence. My own correspondence with the authorities of the state of North Carolina has been carried on not only with courtesy, as may be seen from the record, but with an entire deference to your wishes in the case of Mr. Russell, very much beyond the deserts of that individual in his attempts to evade service."

[The court-martial, it seems, was Russell's striking an officer.]

General Whiting wrote a letter, dated July 4th, which was delayed in the mails. In this he said: "The war department has decided that the claim on the part of the state to Mr. Daniel Russell cannot be admitted, he having been in the service already at the date (February 17th) of the act of organization for the act continued in it all persons belonging to it till the termination. The exemption clauses in that act do not apply to the class whose position had already been determined. They apply only to those who were not in service, but were made liable by universal expression of Sec. 1 of the act and an exception to the operations of that section. The governor's authority to claim as exemptions those in service does not extend to a person in service. I have accordingly notified Mr. Russell that in accordance with the sentence of the court-martial he will be required to select one of the North Carolina companies for service."

The following letter to Vance from General R. E. Lee bears date of August 29, 1864: "I have frequently been called upon to mention the services of North Carolina soldiers in the army of Northern Virginia, but their gallantry and conduct were never more deserving of admiration than in the engagement at Reams Station, on the 25th instant. The brigades of Generals Cook, MacRae and Lane, the last under the temporary command of General Connor, advanced through a thick abatis of felled trees and over a swampy and musky terrain, and carried the enemy's works with a steady courage that elicited the warm commendation of their corps and division commanders and the admiration of the army. On the same occasion the brigade of General Barringer, a member of the cavalry which were not less distinguished for boldness and efficiency than those of the infantry. If the men who remain in North Carolina share the spirit of those they have sent to the field, as I doubt not they do, her defense may be surely entrusted to their hands."

The confederate engineer bureau notified Governor Vance that the Wilmington and Manchester railway was a main line of communication which the government must keep open, and said it must have to relay its track, ten miles of rail, from the Wilmington, Charlotte and Rutherford railway. This drew a spicy letter from President Robert H. Cowan, of the latter road, who wrote Governor Vance that the Wilmington and Manchester railway ought to have been able to get supplies, as it owned a large interest in a steamship company. He added: "I suppose, therefore, that if the managers of the Wilmington and Manchester railway cannot do the work of the government, that you pass the order over to me and my directors with proper authority in the premises, and we will guarantee it shall be done. If you have authority to take ten miles of my road, you have authority to take it all. If you have authority to take my road and give it to the Wilmington and Manchester, you have authority to take that road and give it to me. If that road cannot do your work I can. I refer you to Hon. George Davis and Major Robert Strange, of General Barringer's staff, for anything you may want to know about me."

In a letter dated two days later President Cowan wrote the governor: "If the confederate government will not accept this proposition, I respectfully suggest that you let it go to South Carolina after those roads which it is always going to take up, but never

does." Governor Vance notified General Gilmer that he would not surrender the road unless the legislature consented, as the entire road was mortgaged to the state.

Under date of September 22, 1864, Vance wrote Secretary of War Seddon: "I learn that Lieutenant Colonel W. H. Cowles, First North Carolina cavalry, has been recommended for brigadier of Chamberliss' brigade by his superiors. I beg leave most cordially and earnestly to second the recommendation of this gallant and most accomplished young officer. In addition to rewarding merit and promoting the good of the service, the promotion of Lieutenant Colonel Cowles would furnish grateful evidence to our people of the intention of the war department to promote North Carolinians, when deserving, to the command of troops from other states to which we have submitted, reversed, so long."

Governor Vance wrote Governor Seymour of New York, a letter in which he asked the latter to distribute among North Carolina prisoners in New York state 1,200 pounds sterling, this being sent in three bills of exchange on Col. & Co., of Liverpool, the state's agents. The letter to Governor Seymour expressed admiration for the latter's high character and humanity.

October 28, 1864, Governor Vance wrote Robert M. Ould, confederate commissioner for the exchange of prisoners: "You give me the gratifying information that arrangements have been made for supplying our prisoners north with necessary comforts for the winter and that we would be allowed to purchase supplies in the northern cities. I desire immediately to make arrangements for supplying the troops of this state, who can do so readily, having funds in Europe. If I can have an agent north I should greatly prefer having my brother, General Vance, for this purpose, if the authorities will consent. He is now at Fort Delaware, and his health is daily giving way from his confinement. As it seems that he cannot be exchanged I would be much obliged if your government would grant him this privilege and procure the consent of the enemy. No better man could be found to dispense the bounty of North Carolina and the confederate government."

November 15th Governor Vance wrote President Davis: "I deem it my duty to express you in regard to the situation at Wilmington. I have just returned from a visit to the works below that city and find them in excellent condition so far as I am able to judge. There seems to be nothing wanting but troops. If attacked in such a position I humbly conceive that their capture is inevitable unless strengthened by at least two brigades of veteran troops. The militia assembled and to assemble there I fancy will be totally inadequate to resist a land attack on Fort Fisher, which seems to be a point of real danger. In view of all the facts in the case, of which I presume the commanding general keeps you sufficiently informed, I respectfully submit that General Lee should spare a few veterans as a nucleus for the raw troops defending Wilmington, notwithstanding the pressure upon his line. Except for the moral effect involved in losing our capital, I cannot see that Richmond itself is of any greater importance to us than Wilmington. To leave it entirely in the hands of militia except the garrison I deem extremely injudicious."

General Whiting informed Governor Vance that the men employed at the work on the "sounds" near Wilmington, were traitorous. He wanted them all removed and sent to the army and slaves or free negroes put on the works, which were in charge of D. G. Worth. Finally, November 16, 1864, the war department conscripted all the men. Mr. Worth telegraphed the governor: "The men are all at Wilmington. General Bragg will only allow the teamsters to return to the sound to move property. What shall I do with them and the state's private teams?" To this Governor Vance replied: "The men shall not be conscripted. Inform General Bragg that you have my orders as necessary to remove the property. If he prevents you by force, let me know immediately." He also telegraphed General Bragg: "I learn with surprise that you have seized my salt hands and refuse to permit them to return to the sound to remove property. This is altogether different treatment from what I expected and I inform you candidly I shall resist by every means in my power. These hands are by the laws of our state not subject to conscription." General Bragg informed General Whiting that the latter had not understood his order, and so all the state property was removed.

December 27, 1864, Governor Vance was at Wilmington when that city was attacked. He writes a letter to Mrs. James Spence, of Liverpool, England, in which he thanks her for presiding over the North Carolina stall at a "confederate bazaar" at Liverpool. He says: "Not that this city is attacked and that there is a possibility at least of our only available seaport being closed, I cannot longer delay the pleasurable task of thanking you, even though the roar of artillery shakes the city as I write. You and your colleagues in this are but the sisters of those who here this day are dressing the wounds and wiping away the death damp from the brows of perishing soldiers. I cannot adequately praise and bless this sisterhood of charity and mercy which lends a brightness and a glory to civilization or give you an idea of what it has done for our devoted soldiery." This letter is dated "Headquarters Forces of North Carolina, Wilmington."

January 3, 1865, Governor Vance telegraphed Governor Bragg: "Can I with safety disband the Home Guard for a few weeks? They have to be reorganized under the new law and I think this as good a time as any."

The confederate government appears from the tenor of scores of letters, to have treated North Carolina most unfairly in the matter of running the

blockade, and actually forced the state to sell a half interest in its own blockade runner, the "Advance," which is further shown that this blockade was forced to take out and bring in cargoes for private parties and there are more or less broad hints of speculation. Against all this Governor Vance protested and chafed like a lion. Then the "Advance" was captured by a blockade runner. She was using coal from the mine then known as the "Egypt" mine. On the 25th of December Secretary of the Navy Mallory wrote Governor Vance a letter which produced the following spirited answer: "Your letter with enclosures relative to the loss of the Advance is received. I stated that the loss of the Advance was due to the appropriation of her coal for the steamers of the government. I made this statement of which you complain, deliberately and upon authority which I regard as reliable, and think I have been sustained by the facts. To the contrary, however, if I did actually contribute, and yet when she came to sail the government had taken all the coal and she had to go with North Carolina coal. The coal was actually applied to the use of the Tallahassee, just as I charged. I call your attention to the certificate of Mr. Savage, collector of the port of Wilmington, showing there was no gold on the Advance when she was captured. I do this because of the appearance of an article in the Richmond Sentinel, said to have been written under the auspices of the navy department, in which it was alleged that the Tallahassee carried a quantity of gold on board, the non-appearance of which was supposed to account in part for her capture. Like you, sir, I do not care to discuss the policy of our government in regard to our armed cruisers and blockade runners generally. If I did, I might cite the recent formidable attack upon Wilmington, from which alone we were delivered by the providence of God, as a full confirmation of my opinions. [Governor Vance had protested against the sending out from Wilmington of the Tallahassee, declaring it only irritated the federal and caused actual loss on this state.] I might ask if one of the three vessels which lately entered Wilmington loaded with bacon was not of greater benefit to the confederacy, even though it was the enterprise of 'gamblers' than the destruction of all the engines of the blockade runner in the list you enclose. My opposition to the policy of this government is not based upon anything factious, or any regard for the interest of men who have been making fortunes by running the blockade, whether native or foreign. I never made objection to their being placed under such restrictions as the government thought proper, but why a state struggling for the common good to clothe and provide for its troops in the public service should meet with no more favor than a blockade gambler passes my comprehension."

January 7th Governor Vance wrote President Davis this letter: "I beg leave most cordially to join in the recommendation which I take for granted has been made by his superior officers, of Colonel William Lamb, commanding Fort Fisher, for promotion. I was near by during the recent attack on the fort, and saw the gallant conduct of the men and soldiers alike were enthusiastic in praise of his skill and gallantry. Presuming that the official reports have done justice to his soldierly qualities, I mainly desire to assure you that our people would gladly see him made a brigadier general for North Carolina, though not a citizen thereof."

General Whiting wrote Governor Vance January 4, 1865, that he needed as large a force of free negroes as possible to work on the forts, and that he desired to let the slaves return to their masters. He suggested an enrolled corps of 1,200 to 1,500 free negroes, properly organized into companies according to regulations, entitled to furlough, fed clothed and paid. With these he would guarantee the exemption of slave labor.

This state after the government had broken up its salt works, hired an engineer and cars to haul the salt to Salisbury. The board of public works of Virginia coolly seized this train. The legislature of this state promptly adopted a resolution denouncing this and Governor Vance notified Governor Smith, of Virginia, that he had forbidden the exportation of articles of Virginia upon North Carolina railways.

January 17th Secretary of War Seddon was notified by Vance that the North Carolina legislature had directed the purchase of \$200,000 worth of cotton or tobacco and its shipment for the relief of prisoners of war in northern prisons, "who are in great suffering and want."

Colonel Peter Mallett, commanding conscripts, reported to December 1, 1864, that there were in the state exempt from military service 5,133 state officers and 7,885 by reason of disability.

February 1, 1865, Governor Vance wrote General Bradley T. Johnson the following letter: "Most distressing accounts reach me of the suffering and destitution of the Yankee prisoners under your charge at the prison at Salisbury. If the half be true it is disgraceful to our humanity and will provoke severe retaliation. I hope, however, it is not so bad as represented, but let it be so I hereby tender you any aid in my power to afford to make their condition more tolerable. I know the great scarcity of food which prevails, but shelter and warmth can certainly be provided and I can spare you some clothing if the Yankees will deliver as much to North Carolina troops in northern prisons. Please let me hear from you." February 8th General John C. Breckinridge secretary of war wrote that this letter had been forwarded to him and that he had directed an inspection to be made of the prison and had given such instructions to the inspecting officer as would enable him to correct the evils complained of. That day Governor Vance received the following letter from Captain G. W. Booth: "General Johnson has been absent for over a week and I will give you a short statement. The C. S. prison when established at this place was contemplated for confederate prisoners only, buildings and sufficient ground being purchased for that purpose. About the 5th of November 1864, a large number of prisoners of war, some 8,000, were suddenly sent here, the government having no other place to send them. The grounds were enlarged and such preparations as could be made were arranged for their arrival tents were issued and now they are all under shelter of some sort. The number of prisoners confined here has reached as high a figure as 10,000. When sent here they were in extremely bad condition. Wood

in sufficient quantity is issued them. Only two days have they been without food and the number of one soldier for six months, without designating any particular soldier, and suggesting the immediate delivery of eighty pounds of meat and 180 pounds of flour, or their equivalent in beef or meal, to the nearest commissary agent."

General Joseph E. Johnston March 1st expressed a desire to change the gauge of the North Carolina railroad to five feet. Governor Vance that day telegraphed him "How far do you wish to bring the wide gauge? I do not want it further east than Salisbury, unless great necessity requires it." He also telegraphed Major General Gilmer at Charlotte: "How far do you wish to alter the gauge of the North Carolina road? I object to its being done east of Salisbury. I don't wish the connection broken with the west."

General J. E. Johnston replied: "The change of gauge was ordered by the war department. It is made by an officer who is under my orders." The next day General Johnston sent another telegram: "I find that not the war department but General Bourquard ordered the widening of the railroad. I consider the extension of this work to Danville a military necessity." General Gilmer telegraphed: "It is important to alter gauge at Greensboro and Danville. I beg you will interpose no objection." General R. E. Lee telegraphed: "The Q. M. general and I agree that General Johnston in thinking it all imperative that the widening of the gauge should continue to Danville if possible."

March 3rd Governor Vance telegraphed General Gilmer: "I positively object to the widening of the gauge at Salisbury, unless I am permitted the same control over the force train which the law gives me over the North Carolina roads." That very day the governor wrote General Gilmer his reasons for objecting to the change of gauge east of Salisbury. He said: "I consider the extension of this work to Danville a military necessity. The change of gauge at Greensboro and Danville. I beg you will interpose no objection." General R. E. Lee telegraphed: "The Q. M. general and I agree that General Johnston in thinking it all imperative that the widening of the gauge should continue to Danville if possible."

March 8th Governor Vance telegraphed General Bragg at Goldsboro: "I hope you will induce all slave-owners in Duplin, New Hanover and Onslow to remove immediately all able-bodied slaves to the rear of the state. I am sure all necessary aid in so doing. If necessary I will sustain you in removing by force all such slaves as will likely afford recruits to the enemy. If the owners cannot support them the government can usefully employ them."

March 7th telegraphed General Bragg: "If the government will furnish twenty-two miles of iron and a few hundred hands, the railway to Deep River can be finished in fifteen days. I advise that the iron be taken behind Magnolia and that the effort be made."

March 8th Governor Joe Johnston telegraphed Governor Vance to make a prompt movement to meet the enemy's threatening your capital I need fifty additional wagons and teams to transport supplies to meet the emergency. Can you assist me in having them collected in the vicinity of Raleigh and Smithfield at the earliest possible moment? Governor Vance replied: "I can have fifty wagons, mostly two-horse, by this day week, if you will give authority to impress a few county wagons for post duty. The state has no authority to impress."

March 8th he telegraphed the commandant at Fayetteville: "You have taken the liberty of impressing my wagons without my permission. I send them back for state goods and notify you to keep your hands off them."

Under date of February 24th General R. E. Lee wrote the governor: "The state of despondency that now prevails among our people is producing a bad effect upon the troops. Desertions are becoming very frequent and there is good reason to believe that they are occasioned to a considerable extent by letters written to the soldiers by their friends at home. In the last two weeks several hundreds have deserted from Hill's corps and as the divisions from which the greatest number of deserters have been taken place are composed chiefly of troops from North Carolina they furnish a corresponding proportion of deserters. I think some good can be accomplished by the efforts of influential citizens to change public sentiment and cheer the spirits of the people. It has been discovered that desertion is not the result of a lack of hope and that they had better provide for themselves. They state that the number of deserters is so large in the several counties that there is no danger to be apprehended from the same. The deserters generally take their arms with them. The greater number are from regiments from the western part of the state. So far as the despondency of the people occasions this sad condition of affairs I know of no other means of removing it than by countering an exhibition of prominent citizens. If they would explain to the people that the cause is not hopeless, that the situation of affairs, though critical, is critical to the enemy as well as to ourselves; that he has drawn his troops from every other quarter to accomplish his designs against Richmond and his defeat now would result in leaving nearly all our territory open to us; that this great result can be accomplished if all will work diligently and zealously, and that his successes are far less valuable in fact than in appearance. I think our people would be induced to make one more effort, to bear their sufferings a little longer, and regain some of the spirit that marked the first two years of the war. If they will I feel confident that with the blessing of God what seems to be our greatest danger will prove the means of deliverance and safety. I trust you will do all in your power to help us in this great emergency."

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plied, saying: "Yours has been received giving me the distressing news of the increase of desertion from our armies. I had heard from other sources of this defection of our troops and was already too well aware that the cause of it was to be found in the general public despondency. I inaugurate a series of public meetings in this state by my recent proclamation, for the purpose of reviving public sentiment and though many have been held and many more will be held, yet the near and triumphant approach of the enemy has so alarmed the timid and so engrossed the loyal in preparation for his coming that I fear they will hardly have their proper effect. I have myself been so busy in trying to organize my militia and secure my vast public stores that I have only been able to address the people at two or three points. Rest assured, however, that I am fully alive to the importance of the crisis and whatever man can do in my situation shall be done. I shall now order out the home guard in every county and keep it at work arresting deserters. In many counties, however, they are not so numerous, and from the great number of the deserters and the natural fear of the destruction of their property, etc. If you could send me as many as two regiments of cavalry, by quartering them in the midst of these disaffected districts and foraging upon the friends of the deserters they could not only arrest many but could recruit themselves and horses, restore confidence and inspire with courage the local forces. I earnestly recommend this action, general, and think in the long run it would not weaken your army. I think our people will respond liberally to the appeal for supplies which I have just published this morning at the instance of the secretary of war. The first answer made to it, two hours after its appearance in the morning papers, was from a poor widow of this city, who, hard pressed by poverty in preparation for the times, as I know she is, came yet to offer me two pieces of bacon and a barrel of meal. Such offerings on the sacred altar of our country hallow our cause and I hope will secure God's blessing upon it."

March 9th General Lee replied to the letter as follows: "I return you my sincere thanks for your zealous efforts in behalf of the army and the cause. I have read with pleasure and attention your proclamation and appeal to the people, as also extracts from your addresses. I trust you will infuse into every fellow citizen the spirit of resolution and patriotism which inspires your own action. I have now no cavalry to spare for the purpose you mention. I think the suggestion a very good one and regret I did not receive it earlier. I have sent a force of infantry under the command of General N. D. Johnson to guard the line of the Roanoke and operate as far as practicable in the adjacent counties to arrest deserters. Another detachment of 500 men under Colonel McAllister has been sent to Chatham and Moore counties, in which the bands of deserters are represented to be numerous. They are instructed to take no prisoners among those deserters who resist with arms the civil or military authorities. I hope you will raise as large a force of local troops to co-operate with them as you can and think the sternest course is the best and wisest course to be pursued. The immunity which these lawless organizations afford is a great cause of desertion and they cannot be too sternly dealt with. I hope you will be able to aid General Johnson, who needs all the reinforcements you can give to meet the emergency. The effect of General Sherman's effect would be of the greatest value. I hope the late success of General Bragg, near Kingston, will revive the spirits of the people and render your labors less arduous. The conduct of the widow whom you mention does me the highest commendation. If all our people possess her spirit our success I should feel to be assured."

The last letter in the book bears date March 15th and is to Secretary of War Breckinridge. It is as follows: "I have been informed that certain communications of the Union soldiers to the cause of the confederacy have been submitted to congress in secret session, by the president and the several heads of departments. I have also been informed that their nature was such as to render it entirely proper and indeed painful that I as governor of North Carolina should be informed of their contents. I have therefore the honor to most respectfully request a copy of said papers if not deemed inconsistent with the public good, and have sent the bearer, Major James H. Foote, A. A., a discreet and gentlemanly man, to receive them should you deem it advisable to comply with my request."

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